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## Wrath of the Divine Feminine: Theology of Resistance in Indian Myths

**Abstract:** *Indian mythology and literature are often celebrated for the diversity of characters, yet the representation of women within these traditions is frequently confined to symbols of victimhood and vulnerability. However, Hinduism is equally rich in powerful female figures who embody divinity and valour. Epics like Ramayana and Mahabharata valorise male figures, thereby reinforcing the masculinisation of divinity. However, Hinduism is rich with powerful female figures who embody divinity and whose presence has shaped cultural and spiritual discourses. This paper addresses the lack of a theological engagement in Indian myths by foregrounding characters like Draupathy, Kannaki, and Sati as embodiments of Prakrti or the divine feminine. Through the theoretical framework of theology as articulated by Naomi Goldenberg, the paper explores krodha, the divine rage as a potent mode of resistance, justice and restoration. By placing these women within theology, this paper reclaims their agency and explores how rage functions as a manifestation of Prakrti or sacred feminine power. Ultimately, this paper contributes towards feminist studies of Indian epics by challenging the victim-centric views of female characters and reframing them as active participants in the cosmic order.*

**Keywords:** Theology, Prakrti, Krodha, Divine Feminine, Resistance.

## Wrath of the Divine Feminine: Theology of Resistance in Indian Myths

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### Introduction

Oh the keeper of righteous vows! Whenever righteousness, propriety, probity and virtuousness (collectively called 'Dharma') is on the decline, when those who follow Dharma are tormented and there is an upswing or upsurge of evil and sinful forces, the cosmic mother known as Nature or *Prakrti* manifests herself to reverse this evil trend, and instead, she rejuvenates, enhances, redeems and reinstates those virtues which make a comeback in their original glorious and exalted form. (Valmiki 7)

Thus states Valmiki in *Adbhut Ramayan*, thereby offering a profound perspective on Sita in the *Ramayan*. In Hindu philosophy, *Prakrti* represents the matter or creative force in contrast to *Purusha*, which is pure consciousness. Personified as the Cosmic Mother or *Shakti*, *Prakrti* stands for creation, sustenance, fertility and even destruction. She is the dynamic, feminine energy that manifests the universe. In the *Adbhut Ramayan*, Valmiki highlights how this feminine energy emerges to restore and re-establish dharma amid chaos. However, despite the centrality given to *Prakrti* in Hindu philosophy, the divine feminine is often overshadowed by the celebration of the male heroes.

Like many cultures across the world, Hindu myths highlight male warriors as upholders of virtue. Lord Krishna and Lord Ram are valorised as embodiments of dharma. These epics are named after the male characters, and therefore *Ramayan* is the story of Ram and *Mahabharata* is the story of the descendants of King Bharata. Women are relegated to secondary roles in these epics. In this respect, this paper focuses on exploring the concept of "theology" in ancient Indian myths and literature by focusing on Draupati in the *Mahabharata*, Kannaki in the *Silappathikaram* and the stories of Sati. By examining *krodha* as a tool of resistance, this study foregrounds how these women not only challenge patriarchy but also reveal the presence of the divine feminine in Hindu philosophy.

### Literature Review

Ancient Indian texts like the *Mahabharata* and the *Silappathikaram* are often known for the wider scopes of interpretations they offer. They have been studied from the perspectives of justice, morality and cultural values. Studies also reveal how women characters are positioned within patriarchal

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structures. The article "Feminism in Indian Mythology: A Comparative Study of Sita and Draupati" looks into the role women played in ancient India. It states:

Women during Vedic times were treated as Goddesses or slaves. Either way, their feminine feelings were not considered and were made to behave according to the conventions set by the male-dominated society. They were not allowed to express their true feelings. When we compare Sita and Draupati, we observe that both their miseries and affronts are blatant and due to male members of their families. They both have sacrificed for their families and family honour. Women had no identity of their own and whatever identity they had was due to the 'primaeval myth' which is social typecasts, and Sita and Draupati represent two entirely different aspects of feminine experience which are poles apart. (Padmalochana and Ilkal 2)

This study underscores how female characters were subjected to sacrifice for family honour, thereby highlighting their vulnerability within male-dominated contexts. The article "The Divine Feminine in Hinduism: Goddesses & Empowerment" deeply explores how the Indian mythologist Devdutt Pattanaik has helped in popularising female figures in Indian myths as symbols of wisdom and empowerment:

He explains how these goddesses are not just objects of worship but also embody diverse roles, such as creators, nurturers, warriors and destroyers. Pattanaik explores how goddess worship empowers individuals, particularly women, by providing them with strong role models and a sense of identity. (Padhi et al. 1445).

Modern retellings have also contributed to re-visioning these mythological female characters. Amish Tripathi reimagined Sita through the *Ramchandra Series* and Sati through the *Shiva Trilogy*. Similarly, Chitra Banerjee Divakaruni's *The Palace of Illusions* presents Draupati as a courageous woman, while Utkarsh Patel's *Satyavati* presents the story of Satyavati, the mother of Vyasa and Kavita Kane's *Menaka's Choice* reclaim overlooked women from myth, granting them emotional and intellectual depth. These retellings reflect a growing trend of granting women autonomy and centrality. While much scholarship has been carried out in goddess traditions in Hindu myths, very little theological engagement has been done on exploring them as *Prakrti* and their use of *krodha*. This paper extends the discourse by reading Draupathy, Kannagi and Sati as personifications of *Prakrti* through a theological lens, thereby reclaiming the divine feminine. It puts them in the context of theology and analyses how, though they have been seen as figures who uphold power.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Theology is a feminist spiritual discipline that focuses on the Divine Feminine as a symbol of power and wholeness. It is a neologism that derived from the Greek words *thea*, which means 'goddess' and

*logos* which means 'word'. Unlike theology that centres man as God, theology recenters the feminine as God. Theology as a significant term, emerged in the 1970s. Naomi Goldenberg, Valerie Saiving and Isaac Bonewits are credited for the coinage of the word. The concept questioned the masculinization of divinity. Naomi Goldenberg in *Changing of the Gods* states that "we are about to learn what happens when father-gods die for a whole generation" (Goldenberg 37). Theology has been criticised by many theologians as an attempt by radical feminists to create a new deity and is therefore dismissed as flawed. However, the presence of religious sects like Shaktism clearly marks their relevance. Rather than just being a feminist theology, theology focuses deeply on the spiritual and philosophical experiences of women in myths and rituals. The worship of female deities can be observed in ancient times when fertility figures like Venus were worshipped. Goddess worship can be traced back to the Indus Valley civilisation in Hinduism. Though primarily male-centred, Abrahamic religions too have seen a rise in the importance given to female aspects of divinity by emphasising the virtues of the Virgin Mary in Christianity. This paper uses *krodha* as an aspect of the Goddess. *Krodha* is the divine wrath that has destructive power. Wrath can be framed as a sacred necessity in theology. By placing Draupathy, Kannaki and Sati within this theoretical framework, this study reinterprets them not as passive victims of patriarchy but as embodiments of *Prakrti*, which is the feminine, creative and material principle of the universe that describes the maternal aspects and nature's procreative force.

### **Divine Feminine in Indian Epics**

Indian epics and literature are rich with strong female characters that act as embodiments of feminine power. These women, who are constrained by patriarchal systems, emerge as powerful figures with agency and resistance. Draupati in the *Mahabharata* exemplifies a woman who is reduced to an object in male rivalry. Draupati, being the wife of five brothers, becomes a pawn in the conflict between the Pandavas and Kauravas in the *Mahabharata*. Her humiliation in the court, being dragged and nearly disrobed, marks one of the violent acts against female dignity in epic tradition. She was robbed of her dignity and respect when she was forcefully undressed in front of the whole court by the Kauravas. Yet she transforms the suffering into rage, demanding justice.

In the *Shiva Purana*, Sati embodies the fierce form of femininity. She feels insulted when her husband is disrespected. She showed the courage to embrace death for the dignity of the love of her life. Though tragic, this act exemplifies the power of feminine loyalty and wrath. She gives way for the rebirth of Parvati, thus signifying the cyclical resilience of the divine feminine. Kannaki in *Silappathikaram*, a classic from Tamil literature, shows yet another example of feminine power. After her husband, Kovalan, is unjustly executed, Kannaki confronts the King, thereby exposing the miscarriage of justice. Her fierce wrath burns down the city of Madurai, thus channelling her wrath into

justice and cosmic balance. Transcending mortal suffering, she is later venerated as Goddess Pattini, embodying the transformation of feminine wrath into divinity and justice.

Taken together, these figures, Draupadi, Sati, and Kannaki, illustrate the multifaceted expressions of the divine feminine in Indian epics and literature. They move beyond passive suffering to embody agency, endurance, rage, and justice. While patriarchal narratives often seek to silence or subordinate them, their voices and actions resonate through centuries as symbols of resistance and empowerment. The divine feminine, thus, is not a singular ideal but a spectrum, nurturing yet fierce, enduring yet unyielding, victimised yet victorious.

### **Theology of Wrath**

Wrath or *krodha* has often been dismissed in patriarchal traditions as a destructive or destabilising force, particularly when expressed by women. However, theology, which is a feminist re-centring of the divine feminine, recognises female rage not as irrational excess but as a sacred and transformative energy. Within Hinduism, unlike many other religious traditions, there are profound examples of female figures who exemplify the power of wrath as a tool of justice, balance, and restoration. Kali and Durga, for instance, represent the archetypal forms of feminine rage. Their anger is not merely destructive but regenerative, emerging at moments when cosmic harmony is under threat:

In a religion dominated by male deities who perform heroic acts of saving the people on Earth from demonic attacks, Goddess Durga appears as the only female deity who comes to the rescue of the Gods themselves, when they are unable to control Mahisasura. In post-Vedic texts, it is observed that Goddess Durga takes centre stage as a warrior goddess who protects all those who need her, but she refuses outright stating she does not need protection from any man. She is complete in herself and does not feel the need to have a consort. She is the creator and destroyer of this universe. She is the only female deity who is worshipped alone. She has no consort alongside her. (Pathak and Kongre 518)

By examining mythological heroines, the theological framework foregrounds wrath as an expression of *prakrti*, the sacred feminine force that preserves the moral order of the cosmos. This sacred rage finds human embodiment in Draupadi, one of the most compelling female figures in the Mahabharata. Draupadi's humiliation in the court of Hastinapura, being dragged before her husbands and elders, threatened with disrobing, is an absolute insult. Patriarchal society attempted to silence her by reducing her to an object in the conflict between the Pandavas and Kauravas. "Draupadi's story is one of strength, dignity, and defiance. She challenges the age-old expectations of silence and submission, emerging instead as a timeless symbol of feminine power and justice in Indian mythology." ("Role of Women") Her wrath becomes a theological moment. Draupadi refuses the imposed silence of

patriarchy, invoking divine justice and demanding retribution. Her *krodha* aligns with the theological understanding of wrath as a sacred necessity, an energy that breaks the cycle of victimhood and re-establishes balance. In her refusal to quietly endure humiliation, Draupadi redefines womanhood in myth not as passive endurance but as active resistance. She embodies *Prakrti* in its fierce dimension, manifesting wrath not out of personal vengeance but as a call for the restoration of dharma.

Similarly, Sati's defiance is not an act of weakness but of *krodha* that refuses humiliation. By choosing death rather than silently accepting the insult to her husband, she transforms her body into a site of protest. Her burning body becomes a fiery declaration that dishonouring love and divinity will not be tolerated. In this way, her courage becomes wrath, not chaotic destruction, but a righteous energy that unsettles patriarchal arrogance and restores dignity to the feminine. Kannaki in *Silappatikaram* exemplifies a similar transformation of grief into cosmic rage. Though her husband Kovalan had betrayed her trust, she remains steadfast in her moral integrity. Yet when he is unjustly executed without trial, Kannaki channels her anguish into divine wrath. She fearlessly confronts the king and queen, exposing the miscarriage of justice. In her fury, she sets the entire city of Madurai ablaze:

It is not just her rebellion and cries for justice that gain approval, but also her submission to social and religious expectations. The very idea of 'being Kannaki' is to be surrendered before the larger and eternal realities of the way things are. Kannaki turns her anklet into a terrible instrument of vengeance: it becomes a noose around the king's neck, and Kannaki becomes his executioner. Kannaki represents the ancient belief in a divine mechanism of retributive justice for those whom human laws fail to protect. *Silappatikaram* constitutes a literary reworking and crystallisation of a prevalent South Indian myth of the goddess, especially in her local embodiment in Madurai. (Varsha 2671)

The fire in the story is a symbol of the divine rage she carries. She is destructive so as to restore justice. The symbolism of fire in Kannaki's story is central to theology. Fire embodies both destruction and purification. Her rage, manifested as flames that consume Madurai, is not violence but a divine act of retributive justice, restoring cosmic order where human systems of law had failed. In this sense, her wrath parallels that of Durga and Draupadi, situating her within the continuum of feminine divinity that uses rage as a sacred weapon.

The theological perspective insists that feminine rage is not interchangeable with ordinary anger. Anger, as psychologists argue, signals the crossing of personal boundaries. Feminine rage, however, is deeply collective and socio-political. It arises not only from personal injury but from systemic violations of justice. "Feminine rage is distinct from anger. Feminine rage can be felt by anyone. It is the body's mind's response to injustice. General anger is a signal that a boundary has been crossed. Feminine rage is the specific boundary violation of social injustice. It can be both or

independently personal and impersonal" ("Kali and Feminine Rage"). By this definition, feminine rage is transformative—it bridges the personal and the collective. In Draupadi's humiliation, Kannaki's confrontation, and Sati's self-immolation, wrath transcends the individual and becomes a force of justice that encompasses society and the cosmos. Theology interprets such rage not as an aberration but as an essential expression of *Prakrti*. The divine feminine, in these myths, is not merely a nurturing mother but also the fierce protector who destroys injustice when it threatens to shake the foundations of dharma.

The inclusion of wrath within theology is significant because patriarchal traditions have long relegated women's anger to the margins. Anger in women has been equated with irrationality, hysteria, or moral failure, while male anger is often romanticised as righteous indignation. By contrast, theological readings reclaim women's rage as an ethical and spiritual necessity. In this light, Draupadi's courtroom defiance, Kannaki's fiery destruction, and Sati's courageous entry into fire are not moments of transgression but revelations of the sacred feminine. Their wrath is restorative, not chaotic. It destabilises oppressive orders only to re-establish harmony and justice. Thus, the theology of wrath affirms that rage is not an anomaly within femininity but one of its most powerful expressions. Whether divine or human, the women in these myths use *krodha* as a weapon of resistance and transformation. Their stories remind us that the feminine principle of *Prakrti* encompasses the full spectrum of creation and destruction, nurturing and annihilating, silence and fury. Within theology, wrath emerges as a sacred instrument of justice, a manifestation of the cosmic feminine that refuses subjugation and restores the balance of the world.

## **Conclusion**

Indian myths and stories highlight how many of the female characters use wrath or *krodha* as a powerful weapon of resistance. "We find in the Goddess a compelling image of female power, a vision of the deep connection of all beings in the web of life, and a call to create peace on earth" (Christ 16). The narratives of Draupadi, Kannaki and Sati demonstrate that wrath is not an aberration but an essential expression of the divine feminine. When read through the lens of theology, these figures disrupt patriarchal frameworks that portray women's anger as weakness or irrationality. Instead, they reveal *krodha* as a sacred and regenerative force, one that arises not from ego but from a profound alignment with dharma. Their stories underscore the principle that *prakrti*, the cosmic mother, embodies the full spectrum of creation, preservation, and destruction. By foregrounding wrath as theology, this study reclaims feminine rage as a necessary response to injustice and oppression. Draupadi's defiance against humiliation, Kannaki's fiery resistance against the corruption of law and Sati's sacrifice for dignity collectively affirm that feminine *krodha* is not destructive chaos but a disciplined force of restoration. It is through this energy that harmony is reestablished when worldly and divine orders are disrupted.

Thealogy calls for a reimagining of feminine power beyond the binaries of passivity and nurturing. It emphasises that the sacred feminine holds within herself both the tenderness of creation and the ferocity of destruction. The wrath of these mythological women becomes a reminder that resistance, when born of justice, is divine. In a world where female anger is often dismissed or silenced, thealogy repositions it as a holy weapon of transformation. Ultimately, the thealogy of wrath illuminates the presence of Shakti, the primal feminine energy, as an enduring source of resilience, justice, and liberation for all. “Images of God dictate who will feel worthy in society and who will feel inferior, who will be respected and who will be despised, who will get easy access to the literal, material goods of the culture and who will have to fight for those goods” (Goldenberg 126). These words of Naomi Goldenberg delve into the wide scopes of thealogy and thus reaffirm that re-imagining divine images through female rage is not only an act of resistance but also a reclamation of dignity, justice, and sacred worth.

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